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Social Security Administration could cut up to 50% of its workforce

By **FATIMA HUSSEIN**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Social Security Administration is preparing to lay off at least 7,000 people from its workforce of 60,000, according to a person familiar with the agency's plans who is not authorized to speak publicly. The workforce reduction, according to a second person who also spoke on condition of anonymity, could be as high as 50%.

It's unclear how the layoffs will directly impact benefits of the 72.5 million Social Security beneficiaries, which include retirees and children who receive retirement and disability benefits. However, advocates and Democratic lawmakers warn that layoffs will reduce the agency's ability to serve recipients in a timely manner.

Some say cuts to the workforce are in effect a cut in benefits.

The layoffs are part of the Trump administration's intensified efforts to shrink the size of the federal workforce



A Social Security card is displayed Oct. 12, 2021, in Tigard, Ore.

through the Department of Government Efficiency, run by President Donald Trump advisor Elon Musk.

A representative from the Social Security Administration did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment.

The people familiar with the agency's plans say that

SSA's new acting commissioner Leland Dudek held a meeting this week with management and told them they had to produce a plan that eliminated half of the workforce at SSA headquarters in Washington and at least half of the workers in regional offices. In addition, the termina-

tion of office leases for Social Security sites across the country are detailed on the DOGE website, which maintains a "Wall of Receipts," which is a self-described "transparent account of DOGE's findings and actions." The site states that leases for dozens of Social Security sites across Arkan-

Associated Press

sas, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, and other states have been or will be ended.

"The Social Security Administration is already chronically understaffed. Now, the Trump Administration wants to demolish it," said Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works, an advocacy group for the popular public benefit program.

Altman said the reductions in force "will deny many Americans access to their hard-earned Social Security benefits. Field offices around the country will close. Wait times for the 1-800 number will soar."

Social Security is one of the nation's largest and most popular social programs. A January poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that two-thirds of U.S. adults think the country is spending too little on Social Security.

The program faces a looming bankruptcy date if it is not addressed by Congress. □

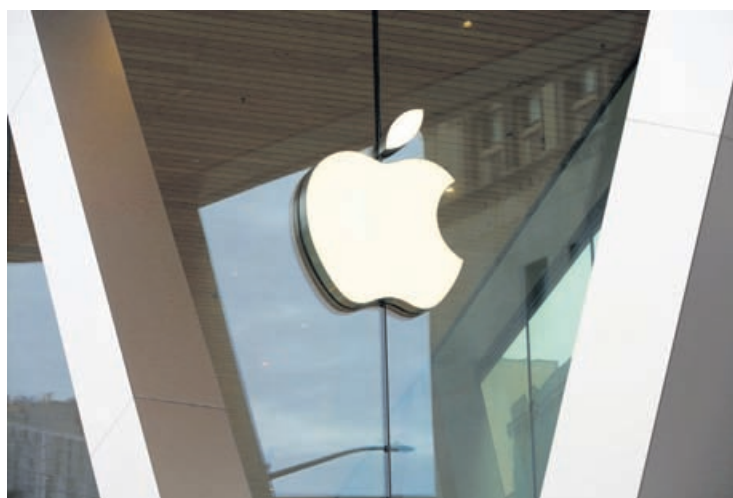
Gabbard decries Britain's reported demand for Apple to provide backdoor access to users' cloud data

By **DAVID KLEPPER**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard says she has serious concerns about the British government's reported demand that Apple provide backdoor access to any data stored in the cloud.

In a written response to members of Congress, Gabbard said this week that such a demand would violate Americans' rights and raise concerns about a foreign government pressuring a U.S.-based tech-



An Apple logo adorns the facade of the downtown Brooklyn Apple store on March 14, 2020, in New York.

Associated Press

nology company.

"This would be a clear and egregious violation of Americans' privacy and civil liberties," Gabbard told Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., who had written to express their worries.

Apple announced last week that it would stop offering an advanced data security option for British users. In a secret order, British security officials demanded that the U.S. tech giant create so-called backdoor access so that they could view fully encrypted ma-

terial, The Washington Post reported this month, citing anonymous sources.

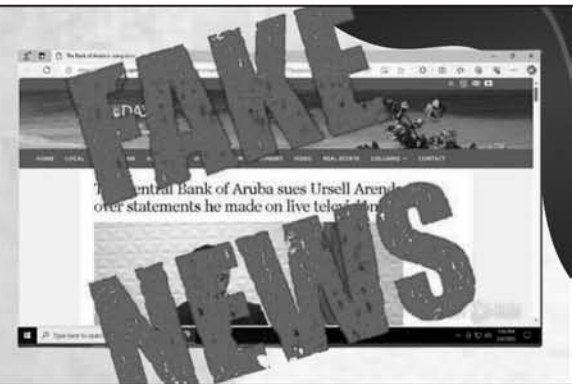
Advanced Data Protection, which Apple started rolling out at the end of 2022, is an opt-in feature that protects iCloud files, photos, notes and other data with end-to-end encryption when they're stored in the cloud.

Gabbard has asked the heads of the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies to study the U.K. demand and said she will discuss it with her British counterparts. □

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Transgender troops are now being identified for removal under Pentagon orders

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The military services have 30 days to figure out how they will seek out and identify transgender service members to remove them from the force a daunting task that may end up relying on troops self-reporting or tattling on their colleagues. A memo sent to Defense Department leaders on Thursday after the Pentagon filed it late Wednesday as part of a response to a lawsuit orders the services to set up procedures to identify troops diagnosed with or being treated for gender dysphoria by March 26. They will then have 30 days to begin removing those troops from service.

The order expands on the executive order signed by President Donald Trump during his early days in office setting out steps toward banning transgender individuals from serving in the military. The directive has been challenged in court.

Initial but incomplete counts of transgender troops easily identifiable through medical records is in the hundreds, U.S. officials said. That's a tiny fraction of the 2.1 million troops serving.

However, the issue has taken up a large part of the Pentagon's attention and time as Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth work to root them out, arguing that their medical condition doesn't meet military standards.

"The medical, surgical, and mental health constraints on individuals who have a current diagnosis or history of, or exhibit symptoms



President Donald Trump listens during a Cabinet meeting at the White House in Washington, Tuesday, Feb. 26, 2025, as Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth listen.

Associated Press

consistent with, gender dysphoria are incompatible with the high mental and physical standards necessary for military service," Darin Selnick, who is serving as defense undersecretary for personnel, said in the new memo.

It claims that the lethality and integrity of the military "is inconsistent" with what transgender personnel go through as they transition to the gender they identify with, and it issues an edict that gender is "immutable, unchanging during a person's life."

Lawyers for six transgender service members who are suing over Trump's executive order have argued in court filings that his directive openly expresses "hostility" toward transgender people and marks them as "unequal and dispensable, demeaning them in the eyes of their fellow service members and the public."

Sarah Warbelow, vice pres-

ident for legal affairs for the Human Rights Campaign, said the new policy puts service members in a difficult position and pushes transgender troops to self-identify.

"All of a sudden, you are going to be required to out yourself. Other people are going to be required to out you," Warbelow said. "If you've got a best friend in the military who happens to know that you are transgender, under this new guidance they're required if you are a woman who is transgender they're required to start referring to you as 'he' and 'sir,' as of today."

Troops are put in the position of having to choose "between the safety of their friends and violating direct orders," Warbelow said, adding that transgender service members may feel pressure to self-identify, knowing that they may be penalized by not coming

forward.

On Thursday, U.S. officials said early rough numbers suggest about 600 transgender troops can be quickly identified in the Navy and between 300 and 500 in the Army. Officials said those individuals could, for example, be identified by documented medical treatments.

Other numbers were not available, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel issues. The officials noted, however, that the early numbers likely fall short of actual totals because some service members may have joined the service after any transition and may not have had medical or surgical procedures that could identify them.

And officials also have warned that they may be limited by health privacy laws on what they can and can't discern or report from

records.

A 2018 independent study by the Palm Center, which researched LGBTQ issues, assessed there were an estimated 14,000 transgender troops among the more than 2 million troops serving.

The new Pentagon policy provides two exceptions: if transgender personnel who seek to enlist can prove on a case-by-case basis that they directly support warfighting activities, or if an existing service member, who was diagnosed with gender dysphoria, can prove they support a specific warfighting need and never transitioned to the gender they identify with and proves over 36 months they are stable in their biological sex "without clinically significant distress."

Gender dysphoria occurs when a person's biological sex does not match up with their gender identity.

If a waiver is issued, the applicant would still face a situation where only their biological sex was recognized for bathroom facilities, sleeping quarters and even in official recognition, such as being called "Sir" or "Ma'am."

Warbelow said transgender troops should wait for additional clarity from the service and their commanding officers before doing anything that would affect their military service also noting that ongoing court cases could affect the policy.

Trump tried to ban transgender troops from serving during his first term, but the issue ended up mired in lawsuits until former President Joe Biden was elected and overturned the ban. □

No big new revelations expected in Justice Department's release of Jeffrey Epstein files

By **ALANNA DURKIN RICHER**
and **MICHAEL R. SISAK**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Pam Bondi is expected to publicly release flight logs and other government documents related to wealthy financier Jeffrey Epstein on Thursday, though the files are unlikely to include new bombshells about the sex trafficking case that has captured the fascination of conspiracy theorists. The documents being released by the Justice Department are unlikely to satisfy online sleuths eager for fresh details about Epstein's crimes and connections to famous people that have long been the subject of intense media scrutiny. The Justice Department said the first batch, expected to be posted online later Thursday, is largely made up of files that have already been circulating in the public domain since Epstein died by suicide in a Manhattan federal jail a month after his arrest in 2019. Before the documents were publicly released, binders that read "The Epstein Files: Part I" were given at the White House to conservative political commentators with large followings on X, formerly known as Twitter. The binders read "declassi-



Conservative political commentator Rogan O'Handley, also known as DC Draino, from left, social media content creator Chaya Raichik and conservative political commentator Liz Wheeler hold up binders with a cover titled "The Epstein Files: Phase 1," with Jack Posobiec at the White House, Thursday, Feb. 27, 2025, in Washington.

Associated Press

fied," though it was not immediately clear if the files had ever been classified, and described Trump's White House as "the most transparent administration." Bondi suggested in a Thursday letter to FBI Director Kash Patel that more records were recently discovered. She ordered the FBI to hand over "the full and complete Epstein files" to her by Friday morning, and directed Patel "conduct an immediate investigation" into why her

order to the FBI to turn over all documents was not followed. Epstein was accused of sexually abusing dozens of underage girls in the early 2000s. He was indicted on federal charges in New York in 2019, more than a decade after he secretly struck a deal with federal prosecutors in Florida to dispose of similar charges of sex trafficking. The case has drawn widespread attention because of Epstein and his former

girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell's links to royals, presidents and billionaires. Maxwell herself is the daughter of the late British media tycoon Robert Maxwell, who once owned the New York Daily News. Over the years, thousands of pages of records have been released through lawsuits, Epstein's criminal dockets, public disclosures and Freedom of Information Act requests. In January 2024, a court unsealed a trove of documents that had been

collected as evidence in a lawsuit filed by Epstein victim Virginia Giuffre. Much of the material, including transcripts of victim interviews and old police reports, had already been publicly known. They included mentions of President Donald Trump, former President Bill Clinton, Prince Andrew and magician David Copperfield, as well as testimony from one victim who said she met Michael Jackson at Epstein's Florida home but that nothing untoward happened with him. The previously released files included a 2016 deposition in which an accuser recounted spending several hours with Epstein at Trump's Atlantic City casino but didn't say if she actually met Trump and did not accuse him of any wrongdoing. Trump has also said that he once thought Epstein was a "terrific guy," but that they later had a falling out. In 2023, The Associated Press obtained thousands of pages of records shedding light on the final days of Epstein's life at a now-shuttered federal jail in Manhattan. They included emails between jail officials, psychological evaluations, internal agency reports, memos and other records. □



Hinds County Chancery Judge Crystal Wise Martin listens to lawyer Rob McDuff, an attorney for Parents For Public Schools, during a hearing in Jackson, Miss., Aug. 23, 2022.

Associated Press

By **ANDREW DeMILLO**
Associated Press

A Mississippi judge on Wednesday vacated her order that a newspaper remove its editorial criticizing local officials, days after a city decided to drop the

lawsuit that spurred it. The judge's order had been widely condemned by free speech advocates as a clear violation of the paper's First Amendment rights. Chancery Judge Crystal Wise Martin had is-

Mississippi judge vacates her order that a newspaper remove its editorial criticizing local leaders

sued the restraining order against the Clarksdale Press Register last week, telling it to remove from its website a Feb. 8 editorial titled "Secrecy, Deception Erode Public Trust." The piece criticized the city for not sending the newspaper notice about a meeting the board held regarding a proposed tax on alcohol, marijuana and tobacco. The board of commissioners dropped the suit Monday at the request of Mayor Chuck Espy, who cited an offer from the paper's owner to run a clarification. However, Emmerich News-

papers president Wyatt Emmerich said he made that offer before the city filed its lawsuit and that it was no longer on the table. Emmerich had offered to clarify that the council said the lack of notification wasn't a deliberate attempt to hide the meeting, according to a text message Emmerich sent to the city attorney. The text also offered to clarify that a sentence questioning whether there was "kick-back from the community" should have said "push back." The city's lawsuit called the editorial libelous and said it

"chilled and hindered" the city's efforts to lobby for the tax with state legislators. The newspaper and other critics of the ruling said the order was a clear example of prior restraint in violation of the First Amendment. The order drew widespread criticism from press groups and free speech advocates around the country, including the National Press Club and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression had agreed to represent the newspaper in court. □

EU pushes back hard against Trump tariff threats and his caustic comments that bloc is out to get US

By **RAF CASERT**
Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union on Thursday pushed back hard against allegations by U.S. President Donald Trump that the 27-nation bloc was out to get the United States, and warned that it would vigorously fight any wholesale tariff of 25% on all EU products.

The tit-for-tat dispute following the comments of Trump, which were aimed at an age-old ally and its main postwar economic partner, further deepened the trans-Atlantic rift that was already widened by Trump's warnings that Washington would drop security guarantees for its European allies.

Thursday's EU pushback came after Trump told reporters that "the European Union was formed in order to screw the United States. That's the purpose of it, and they've done a good job of it," adding that it would stop immediately under his presidency.

Prime Minister Donald Tusk of Poland, which holds the EU's rotating presidency,



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen speaks during the European Industry Summit in Antwerp, Belgium, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2025.

went on a counteroffensive.

"The EU wasn't formed to screw anyone," Tusk said in an X post. "Quite the opposite. It was formed to maintain peace, to build respect among our nations, to create free and fair trade, and to strengthen our transatlantic friendship. As simple as that."

European Parliament President Roberta Metsola was in Washington, where she told an audience at Johns Hopkins University on Thursday that "we are not out to screw anyone," adding that both sides should be "pulling ourselves up together rather than the opposite."

And Spanish Prime Minister

Pedro Sánchez added fiery fuel to the debate.

"We are going to defend our interests when our economies are attacked with tariffs that are completely unjustified and represent a veiled threat to our economic sovereignty."

"We are committed and prepared to do so," he said in northern Spain.

The EU also warned that the moment that tariffs are announced, it would trigger tough countermeasures on iconic U.S. industries like bourbon, jeans and motorcycles.

"The European Union and its member states have been working for months and we are going to adopt measures that are proportional to the challenge," Sánchez said.

Metsola said that the EU would stand up to the Trump administration if tariffs are announced.

"We are very ready for anything. So allow me to be clear: The EU will react firmly and immediately," she said. "We don't want to go down that road let me be clear but we are ready."

Trump said in comments late Wednesday that the United States stood equally ready for a standoff.

"We are the pot of gold. We're the one that everybody wants. And they can retaliate. But it cannot be a successful retaliation, because we just go cold turkey. We don't buy any more. And if that happens, we win." □

Associated Press

North Korea appears to have sent more troops to Russia to back its war against Ukraine, Seoul says

By **HYUNG-JIN KIM**
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea's spy agency said Thursday that North Korea appears to have sent additional troops to Russia, after its soldiers deployed on the Russian-Ukraine fronts suffered heavy casualties.

The National Intelligence Service said in a brief statement it was trying to determine exactly how many more troops North Korea has deployed to Russia.

The NIS also assessed that North Korean troops were redeployed at fronts in Russia's Kursk region in the first week of February, following a reported temporary withdrawal from the area. Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in an address on Feb. 7, confirmed a new Ukrainian offensive in Kursk and said North Korean troops were fighting alongside Russian forces there.

North Korea has been supplying a vast amount of conventional weapons to Russia, and last fall it sent about 10,000-12,000 troops to Russia as well, according to U.S., South Korean and Ukraine intelligence officials. North Korean soldiers are highly disciplined and well trained, but observers say they've become easy targets for drone and artillery attacks on Russian-Ukraine battlefields due to their lack of combat experience and unfamiliarity with the ter-

rain.

In January, the NIS said about 300 North Korean soldiers had died and another 2,700 had been injured. Zelenskyy earlier put the number of killed or wounded North Koreans at 4,000, though U.S. estimates were lower at around 1,200.

Earlier Thursday, South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper, citing unidentified sources, reported that an additional 1,000-3,000 North Korean soldiers were deployed to Kursk between January and February.

South Korea, the U.S. and their partners worry that Russia could reward North Korea by transferring high-tech weapons technolo-

gies that can sharply enhance its nuclear weapons program. North Korea is expected to receive economic and other assistance from Russia as well. During talks in Saudi Arabia

last week, Russia and the U.S. agreed to start working toward ending the war and improving their diplomatic and economic ties. Ukrainian officials weren't present at the talks. □



A TV screen at Seoul Railway Station in South Korea, on Oct. 21, 2024, shows an image of soldiers believed to be from North Korea standing in line to receive supplies from Russia.

Associated Press

At least 11 dead and scores injured in Congo after blasts at M23 rebel leaders' rally, rebels say

By JANVIER BARHAHIGA and MONIKA PRONCZUK
Associated Press

BUKAVU, Congo (AP) — At least 11 people were killed and scores injured Thursday when explosions in the eastern Congo city of Bukavu struck a rally held by leaders of the M23 rebel group, which took control of the city earlier this month. Rebel leaders blamed the bombing on Congo's government and said attackers were among those killed in the blasts, with conflicting reports among rebels and local officials about the number of attackers and victims. Congo's president blamed the attack on unspecified "foreign" forces. "The attack caused 11 deaths and verifications are underway. The author of the attack is among the victims," Corneille Nangaa, leader of the Congo River Alliance (AFC), which includes the M23, told reporters. "There are 65 injured, six of whom are seriously injured and are currently being treated in the operating room." He said that "following today's unfortunate incident, we are obliged to react."



In this video frame grab, people assist victims after two explosions hit a meeting of M23 rebel group leaders and residents in Bukavu, eastern Congo, Thursday, Feb. 27, 2025.

Associated Press

Leaders of the M23 rebel group, including Nangaa, were meeting residents when the explosions occurred in the central part of Bukavu. Video and photos shared on social media showed a crowd fleeing the mass rally in Bukavu and bloodied bodies on the ground. M23 accused

the Congolese authorities of orchestrating the attack. "We are accusing and condemning vigorously the criminal regime of Kinshasa, which ... just implemented its plan of exterminating civilian populations," AFC said in a statement. "This attack caused several deaths, including a few ter-

rorists from Kinshasa and some injured. Two of them were immediately apprehended by our services." "This cowardly and barbaric act will not be without consequences," it added. "Change and development" Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi called the attack

"a heinous terrorist act that was perpetrated by a foreign army illegally present on Congolese soil."

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, over 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) away.

Jean Samy, deputy president of the civil society Forces Vives of South Kivu, told The Associated Press that the attack was "a sabotage."

"Until now, we do not know where these grenades came from," he said by phone.

"We have already recorded more than 13 deaths and serious injuries who will have to have their hands and legs amputated. The perpetrators of this act are still unknown."

Nangaa was among leaders leaving the podium when two blasts rocked the scene, according to a journalist present at the rally. Nangaa had earlier told the rally that M23 was bringing "change and development" to their city. □

2 men were publicly caned for having sex with each other in Indonesia's conservative Aceh

By YAYAN ZAMZAMI
Associated Press

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia (AP) — Two men in Indonesia's conservative Aceh

province were publicly caned Thursday after an Islamic Shariah court convicted them for having sex with each other.



A Shariah Law official uses a rattan cane to whip one of two men convicted of gay sex in Banda Aceh, Aceh province, Indonesia, Thursday, Feb. 27, 2025.

Associated Press

Dozens of people witnessed the caning at a hall in Banda Aceh's Bustanus-salatin city park. It's the fourth time that Aceh, the only province in Indonesia to practice Shariah law, has caned people for homosexuality since the Islamic law was implemented in 2006 as a concession made by the government to end a long-running separatist rebellion.

The men, aged 24 and 18, were whipped across the back dozens of times by a team of five enforcers wearing robes and hoods. They were given a break to drink after 20 strokes and their wounds were treated. The men were arrested in November after residents

suspected them of being gay and broke into their rented room, where they were caught naked and hugging each other, and took them to Sharia police. A Shariah court on Monday sentenced the two college students to receive 85 and 80 strokes respectively, but they were caned 82 and 77 times after a remission for time spent in prison. One of the men had to be carried because he was too weak to move after the last lash. Two other people were also sentenced to 34 and 8 strokes each for gambling. Indonesia's secular central government granted Aceh the right to implement Islamic Shariah law in 2006 as part of a peace deal to

end a decades-long separatist war.

A religious police and court system have been established, and the law was a significant strengthening of Shariah in the region.

Aceh implemented an expansion of Islamic bylaws and criminal code in 2015 that extended Shariah law to the province's non-Muslims, who account for about 1% of the population. The region allows up to 100 lashes for morality offenses including gay sex and sex between unmarried people.

Caning is also a punishment in Aceh for gambling, drinking alcohol, women who wear tight clothes and men who skip Friday prayers. □

Don't forget to visit Aruba's famous Red Anchor

At the south east coast of the island, standing alone on a windswept and barren land stands a popular Aruba landmark – a large anchor. It overlooks the sea just beyond, watching over the shipping lanes. It stands there in memory and in honor of all seamen who have lost their life at sea.

Where to Find the Anchor? The anchor is a “must see” landmark when you visit Aruba. It is among the most photographed historical landmarks for the island. You want to make sure you add this stop on your itinerary when your visiting the south coast of Aruba. The bright red anchor against the backdrop of the deep blue Caribbean sea and the azure blue skies, make a great backdrop for your vacation pictures.

The anchor is located at the entrance to Gate 6 to the former Lago Colony. It is on the outskirts of Seroe Colorado, on the south east point of the island at the “T” junction to Baby Beach.

Depending on where you are staying on the island, follow the signs that indicate the way to Baby Beach. Once you reach the T-junction, it will be right in front of you.

About the Anchor Size

It will be hard to miss the anchor, it's huge! The anchor that weighs 21,772 kilos, is approximately 10 feet 6 inches wide and 15 feet, 6 inches tall.

On the anchor there are some numbers. The 4112 and 4115, which are believed to be the serial numbers that refer to the “fluke” or horizontal and vertical parts of the anchor, respectively. The number 21772K refers to the weight of the anchor in kilos. This type of anchor was manufactured by Hoesch Dortmund Horde, at a foundry located in Germany.

Where did the Anchor Come From?

There are a number of stories as to the origins of the anchor, which one do you think it was? (Unfortunately the mystery has never been solved, so your imagination

can pick which one you think it might be!)

Story 1:

“According to Mr. Manuel M. Curiel, an ex-Lago Tug Captain, a fully laden VLCC (Very Large Crude Carrier) was seeking a mooring at the 15-mile anchorage, known as Bara, on the southern part of the island. This is the usual shallow mooring location for ships awaiting orders, etc. The weather was rough with strong current. The normal procedure is that they would walk out three shackles (about 90 feet) until the anchor touches the bottom while the chain must rest on the bottom. Subsequently, they will walk out some extra shackles and when the ship starts to swing or lean on one side, the anchor is properly set. Because of the rough weather, unfortunately they did not get the time to walk out the extra tackles and because of the tension exerted on the winch, it broke, and they lost the anchor and its chain.”

Story 2:

“Mr. Curiel also said that at one time a small tanker with a Korean crew, while lifting their anchor also lifted another anchor near the inner harbor. When the ship asked for assistance, he went with his tugboat along with a barge, to help. But eventually they had to cut the chain and let the anchor go to the bottom because they could not untangle them.”

How Did The Anchor Become a Landmark?

Sometime between 1980 and 1985, three gentlemen (Mr. Wim Martinus – the Harbor-master of Aruba; Mr. August Genser – the ex-Division Superintendent of Lago's Laboratory; and Mr. Willie Davis – Owner of Filtec at Zeewijk in San Nicolas), were having a conversation with Mr. Charlie Brouns Jr. at his famous Charlie's Bar and Restaurant in San Nicolas. Charlie, who was a visionary and had dreams for developing the San Nicolas area, told these gentlemen that he would like to come up with something innovative for the San Nicolas area to draw tourism to the area.

The “anchor”, which at that time was being stored at the Oranjestad harbor, was suggested as an option. Charlie liked the idea! He then contacted the President of Lago for permission to acquire the anchor. He was granted permission and the anchor was then relocated to its present location and dedicated “To All Seamen” on the occasion of the closing of the Lago Oil Refinery on March 31, 1985.

Through the Years

Through the years the Anchor was slowly weathering from the wind and salt. As time passed, sadly the origin and purpose of the anchor slowly faded away from people's memories.

After Charles Brouns Jr died on September 15, 2004, his friend Mr. Sam Speziale, requested assistance from the management of Valero Aruba Refinery to help maintain the monument. The Valero Aruba Refinery, graciously sandblasted and painted the anchor and poured a concrete pad around it. On April 17, 2005, the anchor monument was rededicated “To All Seamen” in a formal ceremony in memory of Charles Brouns Jr.



emony in memory of Charles Brouns Jr.

Today, the anchor stands both as memorial to all seaman who have lost their lives at sea, but also as a silent reminder that Seroe Colorado is part of San Nicolas and that San Nicolas is still a vibrant and important part of the island of Aruba.

The Best Time to Visit

When your planning your visit to the south end of the island,

you will want to include in your itinerary the many things to see and do there. The anchor will be just one of these stops, (keep an eye out for our future editions, we publish our recommendations!).

With that being said, I have to say, if you enjoy catching a sunrise, the anchor is one of the best places on the island to catch the sunrise. But in reality, anytime is a good time to visit, depending on your personal schedule. ☐

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For today we received a lovely message from Barry and Connie Robb of Steubenville Ohio, USA.

They wrote to us saying: Aruba to me is "Watching a romantic sunset with my best friend."

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers! ☐

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Forgotten gems Open air movie theaters

(Oranjestad)—During the span of over 100 years, Aruba only saw five open air movie theatres. Now practically obsolete on the island, these theaters were once frequently visited by locals and migrants in the 20th century.

The first open air theater was constructed in 1920 and was commissioned by Shon Eduard (Eddy) de Veer. This theater was located at the Hotel Colombia in Oranjestad, which is now where the Aruban census office is located. The theater was simple; it only consisted of a screen, and visitors had to bring their own chairs to enjoy the popular silent movies of

the time.

American migrants who worked in the refinery and lived in the Lago Colony in Sero Colorado also had their piece of the pie with their Open air Theatre, which formed part of the Esso Club, also known as the Pan-Am Club. It was at this theater that "Talkies" were first streamed, movies with sound. This theater mostly streamed American blockbusters for the American expats, this way making sure that these migrant were not missing out on entertainment from their home land.

In the 1950's and 60's, Savaneta saw their own open

air theater, located in front of the Marinier's Kazerne (Marine Barracks). This theater was mostly visited by the neighboring marines, who didn't have much entertainment other than movies at that time. The last and most recent open air theater was constructed in the form of a drive-in theater. A popular American concept, the Drive Inn located in Balashi was a hot spot for teenagers, who had the habit of cramming all their friends in one car to go see the movies. For this phenomenon there was a separate price that you had to pay called the "car crash".

This theater closed around



2012, but was re-opened during the pandemic in July 2020, where movies were streamed on a gigantic screen set up in front of stacked containers. However, this nostalgic form of entertainment did not last very long as it was closed

again only a year or two later. Nowadays you can still see the stacked containers when you drive near the bridge in Balashi.

Source: "De kolibrie op de rots en meer over de geschiedenis van Aruba" by Evert Bongers.

Aruban legends: Frenchman's Pass

(Oranjestad)—If you ever plan on taking a group tour of the island, you may pass through the Frenchman's Pass in Balashi. The Frenchman's pass (known to locals as "Franse Pas") remains a mysterious—and spooky—road of which its legend is told from generation to generation.

The history of the Frenchman's pass—and how it got its name—dates back to the colonization era, when the French tried to colonize the island, but were met with an angry mob of indigenous settlers, refusing to give up their land. However, as the French were heavily equipped with fire arms, the indigenous settlers began to retreat, and hid away in nearby caves. The

French colonizers tried to smoke them out of the caves, but the indigenous settlers ended up inhaling too much smoke and most died in those caves. From then on, this passage was known as Frenchman's Pass, and there have been many accounts of spirits roaming the area of Spanish Lagoon.

There are many ghost stories surrounding this area, but one of the most famous one involves a lonely hitchhiker, trying to find a ride back home in the dark rainy night.

Sometime after trying to hitchhike, the man saw a car approaching, appearing almost ghost-like in the rain. However, since he needed a ride real bad, he didn't think twice

and jumped in. But to his horror, he noticed that there was no driver in the front. Paralyzed with fear, he didn't dare to get out, and the car started to move.

When approaching a sharp turn, the hitch hiker braced for impact, but just when he thought the car might drive straight off the road and crash, he saw a hand appear out the window and turn the wheel. For the next few turns, the hand appeared again. After having had enough, the man decided to jump out and he ran to Santa Cruz.

Arriving at a nearby bar, he ordered a drink and began to tell everyone about his experience. Ev-

everyone grew quiet, because they realized he wasn't some drunk messing around; he was telling the truth.

Sometime later, two men walked into the bar and one of them noticed the hitchhiker. He called out to his buddy and said: "Look, there's the idiot who sat in our car when we were pushing it!"

French man's pass is one of the few sites on the island that keeps the locals on their toes. While most ghost stories may not have real grounds—or some may even be a set up story for a joke, this pass contributes a lot to our culture of folkloric story-telling.

Source: visitaruba.com

Basic driving rules on Aruba: Roundabouts

(Oranjestad)—Have you ever felt confused when you're driving on the highways or backstreets of Aruba? Then we present a simple guide to some of the basic rules of Aruban traffic, along with some tips for things to look out for.

Speed limit

Legally, the speed limit on the four-lane highways is 80 km/h. This speed limit also counts for the main roads that are connected to the highways. The minimum speed is 50 km/h. Most people drive around 60 km/h on the main roads and about 70 km/h on the highways. There are also areas that indicate a speed limit on a sign; these are usually around populated and school areas.

The four-lane highways contain the left-lane, also known as the "fast" lane for each direction. Here is where vehicles can drive up to the maximum speed. However, legally it is not permitted to drive for long periods of time on the left lane. This lane is primarily designed for drivers to switch lanes before a roundabout, for example, if your exit on the roundabout is on your far left. The general lane to drive in—both at maximum and minimum speed—is on the right lane.

Roundabouts

Speaking of roundabouts, it is important to know where you have to enter and drive on the roundabout to make your exit. A good rule of thumb is to count the exits starting from your right side. So, exit 1 would be on your right; exit 2 would be straight ahead; exit 3 would be on your far left and exit 4 would lead to the road paralleled to the one you're on, heading in



the other direction.

Most roundabouts have these 4 exits, so they are relatively simple. When you're driving on the four-lane highway, it is important to know when to switch to the left lane to make your exit: if your exit is on your far left (exit 3), then you need to switch to the left lane on the high way before nearing the roundabout so you can take the path that leads you directly to your exit. If your exit is on your right or if you're going straight ahead, you can keep driving in the right lane of the highway.

It's also important to know that vehicles about to enter the roundabout must yield to those already on it. A good rule of thumb is to look out if someone is coming from your left side.

However, other roundabouts can

be quite tricky to navigate...

Watty Vos Boulevard (the "paperclip" roundabout)

Probably the biggest roundabout on the island, the "paperclip" roundabout on the Watty Vos Boulevard is one of the trickier roundabouts that could—and has—caused confused among both tourists and locals. However, once you take a good look at it, it's fairly simple. The basis is just the same as a regular roundabout (left exit? left lane! etc.), but instead of having four different exits like on a regular roundabout, now you have two extra; one on the right and the other on the left side of the roundabout. The rules don't change at all, you just have to keep an extra eye open.

Airport roundabout

Ah, yes. The infamous airport roundabout. The favorite round-

about amongst local, because of its easy (hard) lanes that never (always) cause confusion among drivers. Sarcasm aside, this roundabout can be tricky to enter, especially when you're driving from the direction of the airport heading. When you're driving away from the airport reaching the roundabout, you'll be faced with three lanes. The far right lane is to take the exit 1 out heading east (right lane of highway). The middle exit is used for exit 1 (left lane of highway), 2 and 3. The far left exit is used to only exit on exit 3 (left lane of highway) and 4.

"Las Americas" roundabout

The Las Americas roundabout is located near the Talk of the Town hotel, west from the airport roundabout. This roundabout may look like a regular roundabout—and for the most part, it is. However, when you are driving from the east going in the direction of town, please take note that there are two exits on your right.

When you're driving towards this roundabout, you'll notice that the road becomes wider, splitting into two lanes. The right lane is used to take the first and second exit on the right. If you want to exit straight ahead, you must drive on the left lane!

It's always scary to drive in new places where the traffic may look and work differently, but once you get it right once, you'll get the hang of it in no time. Additionally, all roundabouts and roads on Aruba have signs and arrows painted on the road to help guide you. So take your time, keep your eyes open and don't forget to wear a seat belt! ☐



Aruba's neighborhoods; the meaning behind their names

Just like any other country, Aruba has unique and beautifully named neighborhoods that all form a part of its culture and development. Many of these names have a historical background and meaning that teaches us about the island and its rich culture every day.

With this series, we want to take you on a journey of discovery, where you'll learn not only the beautiful names but the history behind it that gives it life and meaning.

Anabui/Tierra Del Sol

This neighborhood can be seen on Van Raders map and Werbata as Anna Boei. Anna Boei is a name of which there isn't much information about its origin.

The best historians were able to deduce is that this name came to be because of a miscommunication between Van Spengler and the natives who were living on the island. In the Arawak/Taino language one can find the word Anaiboa, which consists of Ana meaning flower or the best and Iboa; the juice of a cassava, which together would mean "the best juice of a cassava".

If one assumes that the actual word heard was Anaboio instead, consisting of Ana meaning the best and Boio (bohio); house, the itera-



tion of Anabui would mean "the best house." This is the origin that has been more or less speculated and assumed for the word Anabui and its meaning.

During the second world war and later, this area was used as a terrain for training of shooting by militia and latero n Korps Mariniers

(the marines of Aruba). By the end of the previous century a large part of Anabui was developed to have luxurious villas and a golf course, which lead to it getting the name Tierra Del Sol, Spanish for Land of the Sun. The name is not an official name, but the name of the development project that took place. It is hoped that the original and 'old' name of Anabui is never lost and now it will be remembered by both locals and tourists.

Angochi

This name can be seen on the Werbata map with little and cursive letters. It is the unofficial name for the area given by a tenant to the land that was rented to him.

The biggest probability that historians believe is that it comes from native descent, during the time in the 19th century where Mestizos still lived on Aruba. The name can't really be explain and according to books on its history seems to be more of a sign of corruption.

However, it seems to come from combining A(n), which is a generalizing prefix and Goeiza, which means 'the spirit of a living man'. Angochi remains more of a guess. □

This neighborhood's abbreviation is:
An.

Adriaan Laclé One of Aruba's richest men in the twentieth century



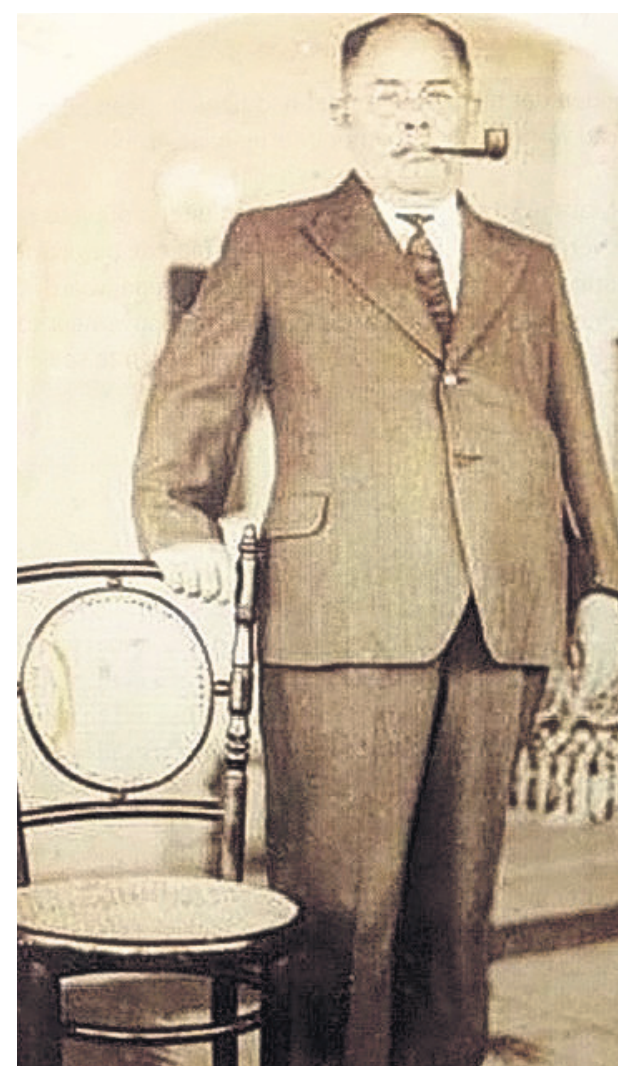
(Oranjestad)—The name Adriaan Laclé may ring a bell to locals as one of the bigger roads on the island, but about a century ago, Adriaan Laclé was a rich businessman, well-known for his generosity, wealth, and taste.

Adriaan was born in 1866 and was the eldest of six children. Not much is known about his childhood upbringing or any of his earlier business ordeals, but during his hay day he often helped people get loans, was a well-established trader, and owned several plots of land. In fact, he commissioned the construction of the famous La Quinta Carmen manor—now a restaurant.

Though he himself never lived in the beautiful manor, his own house also reflected his success and good taste. Today his house still stands in good condition and can be found in the back streets of main street Oranjestad.

Regarding his personal life, it has been said that he was married twice during his lifetime. He had his first daughter during his first marriage but lost his wife soon after her birth. During his second marriage, he fathered 16 children. However, it has been said that only 11 of those 17 made it past 18 years of age. Perhaps two of his most well-known daughters are Maria Monica Laclé and Maria Veneranda Laclé, who went on to marry successful brothers Eloy Arends and Maximilian Arends, respectively. Their houses are still standing; Eloy and Maria Monica's mansion functions as a townhall, used to host civil marriages, while Maximilian and Maria Veneranda's house stands on the opposite side of the road to them—though currently under renovation after years left in ruin. □

Source: De Kolibrie op de Rots (en meer over de geschiedenis van Aruba) by Evert Bongers.



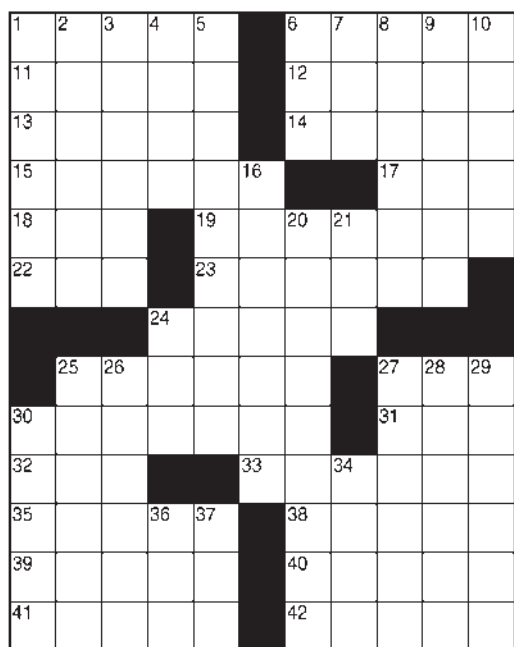
CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 39 King or czar
 - 40 Bile source
 - 41 Asparagus unit
 - 42 Perfect places

DOWN

- 1 Horrify
- 2 Brain cases
- 3 — up (got dressed)
- 4 Track shape
- 5 Like wind and solar energy
- 6 Binary digit
- 7 Peace, to Caesar
- 8 Harmony
- 9 Aegean island
- 10 In shape
- 16 Tea urn
- 20 Esteemed
- 21 Break off
- 24 TVs Danson
- 25 Join forces
- 26 Sing like a bird
- 27 Statue setting
- 28 Flag
- 29 Some fishers
- 30 Carries
- 34 Reached base, in a way
- 36 Pasture
- 37 Make goofs



3-2

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-2

CRYPTOQUOTE

QKK EQXC KYPN MRCD HVX

MNQZ XY FNX XDNRZ OQFC.

— FRKKRQL CDQINCONQZN
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: MARCH, WHEN
GETTING LONG, LET THY
GROWING HOURS BE STRONG TO SET RIGHT
SOME WINTRY WRONG — CAROLINE MAY

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			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
SAT	01	STAR PRIDE	06.00	18.00	B	1
		THE WORLD	09.00	****	C	1
SUN	02	AIDAPERLA	08.00	18.00	B	1
		THE WORLD - DEPT.	****	23.00	C	-
		CELEBRITY BEYOND	09.00	21.00	I	1
MON	03	CELEBRITY ECLIPSE	08.00	****	B	1
		EMERALD PRINCESS	09.00	18.00	C	1
TUE	04	CELEBRITY ECLIPSE - Dept.	****	21.00	B	-
		CARNIVAL HORIZON	09.00	23.00	C	1
		CELEBRITY REFLECTION	08.00	21.00	I	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1
WED	05	MARELLA DISCOVERY	08.00	20.00	B	1
		AIDABELLA	10.00	22.00	C	1
THU	06	CORAL PRINCESS	08.00	17.00	C	1
FRI	07	NORWEGIAN JEWEL	11.30	20.30	C	1
SAT	08	SEVEN SEAS GRANDEUR	10.00	23.00	C	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

Supermarket hours

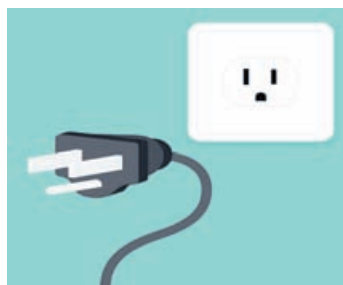


Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basicbut important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

lets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Electrical power



Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of out-

Drinking water



The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Safety



Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

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One Tech Tip: Getting a lot of unwanted phone calls? Here are ways to stop them

By **KELVIN CHAN**
Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Unwanted phone calls are out of control. Whether it's a robocall trying to sell you something or spam calls from scammers trying to rip you off, it's enough to make you want to stop answering your phone. So what can you do to stop them?

The scourge of unwanted phone calls has been branded an epidemic by consumer groups, while the Federal Communications Commission says it's the top consumer complaint. The calls are a nuisance to many ordinary people, some of whom have complained to The Associated Press.

"I need help on getting spam calls to stop," one reader said in an email. She's getting up to 14 calls a day despite the countermeasures she's employed. As the name implies, robocalls are automated calls to deliver recorded messages to a large number of phones. A robocall purely to deliver a message or collect a debt is allowed under U.S. regulations, but the Federal Trade Commission says robocalls with a recorded voice trying to sell you something are illegal unless you've given explicit written permission to receive them. Many robocalls are also probably scams, the FTC warns.

If you're flooded by unsolicited calls, here are some ways to fight back.

Phone settings

Smartphone users can turn on some built-in settings to combat unknown calls.

Apple advises iPhone users to turn on the Silence Unknown Callers feature. Go to your "Settings," then scroll down to "Apps," and then to "Phone," where you'll see it under the "Calls" section. When you turn this on, any calls from numbers that you've never been in touch with and aren't saved in your contacts list will not ring through. Instead, they'll be sent to voicemail and show up in your list of re-



Associated Press

One Tech Tip: Getting a lot of unwanted phone calls? Here are ways to stop them

cent calls.

Android has a similar setting that allows you to block calls from private or unidentified numbers, although you will still receive calls from numbers that aren't stored in your contact list. After this story was first published, a reader wrote in with a workaround for that problem: Leave your Android phone on Do Not Disturb but configure it so that anyone on your Contacts list is allowed to interrupt. Just keep in mind that you could also end up not getting important calls, which sometimes come from unknown numbers.

If an unwanted call does get through, both Android

and iPhone users can block the individual phone number by tapping on it in the recent callers or call history list. You can also enter numbers directly into your phone's block list.

Do not call

Sign up for the national Do Not Call registry, which is a list of numbers that have opted out of most telemarketing calls. The Federal Trade Commission, which runs the registry, says it only contains phone numbers and holds no other personally identifiable information, nor does the registry know whether the number is for a landline or a cell-phone. The FTC says there are some exemptions, in-

cluding political calls, calls from non-profit groups and charities, and legitimate survey groups that aren't selling anything. Also allowed are calls from companies up to 18 months after you've done or sought to do business with them. □



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In 'My Dead Friend Zoe,' a dark comedy about PTSD

By **JAKE COYLE**
AP Film Writer

Even for a film titled "My Dead Friend Zoe," the opening scenes of Kyle Hausmann-Stoke's movie have a startling rhythm.

First, two female American soldiers are riding in a Hum-vee in Afghanistan 2016 blasting Rihanna's "Umbrella." They are clearly friends, and more concerned with the music coming through loudly than enemy fire. Zoe (Natalie Morales) tells Merit (Sonequa Martin-Green) tells that if they ever set foot in "some dopy group therapy," to please kill her. Cut to years later, they're sitting in a counseling meeting for veterans and Morales' character has a sour look at her face. She turns to her friend: "Did we survive the dumbest war of all time just to sit here all broken and kumbaya and ouchie-my-feelings?"

But after this rush of cavalier soldiering and bitter sarcasm comes a sobering moment. Merit blinks her eyes and is instead staring at an empty chair. Zoe isn't there at all. "My Dead Friend Zoe," co-starring Morgan Freeman and Ed Harris, confronts a dark reality of post-combat struggle with as much humor and playfulness as it does trauma and sorrow. It comes



This image released by Briarcliff Entertainment shows Natalie Morales, left, and Sonequa Martin-Green in a scene from "My Dead Friend Zoe."

Associated Press

from a real place, and you can tell. Hausmann-Stoke is himself a veteran and "My Dead Friend Zoe" is dedicated to a pair of his platoon mates who killed themselves. The opening titles note the film was "inspired by a true story." Audience disinterest has characterized many, though not all, of the films about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and the output has pretty much dried up over the years. "My Dead Friend Zoe" feels like it was made with an awareness of that trend and as a

rebutal to it. This is an often breezy and funny movie for what, on paper, is a difficult and dark story.

But the comic tone of "My Dead Friend Zoe" is, itself, a spirited rejection to not just the heaviness of many films about veterans but of the grief that can consume those who have dealt with loss and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Throughout the film, Zoe appears only to Merit, ala Brad Pitt in "Fight Club," singing alongside her as she drives or impatiently waiting for

Merit to come home from a run. Whether this, following some unspecified end to Zoe, is a healthy thing or not for Merit is increasingly in doubt. Merit needs to cling to her friend, or her memory of her. But Zoe also rolls her eyes at any suggestion of talking through her feelings. Zoe, as an apparition, is both the cause and relief to her pain. There are a few other points of view, courtesy of two of our finest actors. Freeman plays the counselor of Merit's mandatory group sessions. He refuses to let

Zoe coast. To pressure her to share and participate, he threatens withholding Zoe's certification.

Meanwhile, Merit's grandfather, Dale (Harris), a Vietnam vet, has just been diagnosed with early Alzheimer's. Merit is tasked with keeping an eye on him at his rural lake-side cabin and helping him into a retirement community a prospect that infuriates him. As Merit's original inspiration for joining the army, Dale stubborn and tight-lipped epitomizes an earlier generation of soldier. In toggling between the present and wartime flashbacks, "My Dead Friend Zoe" is sometimes a bumpy ride. The interplay between Merit and Zoe also shifts, beginning more like a buddy comedy and veering toward horror-film haunting, especially when Merit hesitantly agrees to a date with a worker at the prospective retirement home (Utkarsh Ambudkar).

But the movie's earnestness carries it through these less smooth moments. So does the cast. Any opportunity to see Freeman or Harris, still at the top of their games, is a chance to be treasured. Freeman is typically sage and Harris characteristically fiery. But the leads are even better. □

Music Review: Ella Fitzgerald is in fine form on 1967 concert album, 'Ella at the Coliseum'

By **STEVEN WINE**
Associated Press

The setting is less grand than suggested by the title of a new Ella Fitzgerald album, "The Moment of Truth: Ella at the Coliseum." In this case, the coliseum is not in Rome or Los Angeles, but the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum Arena in Oakland, California.

Jazz giant Fitzgerald's presence elevated any event, however, and that was the case on June 30, 1967, when she performed at a concert that also included The Duke Ellington Orchestra and other luminaries.

"The Moment of Truth" documents Fitzgerald's set, and her incompara-

ble alto is in typically fine form. She bounces and glides, blares and coos, bellows and whoops and scats and swings to the audience's delight. "If you love her, clap!" someone shouts. The album, which will be released Friday, features performances of nine songs unearthed from the private tape collection of Verve Records founder Norman Granz. The vinyl release offers outstanding sound quality and extensive, informative liner notes by the critic Will Friedwald. He notes that while it was unusual for Fitzgerald to sing contemporary pop tunes, the set includes her only known performance

of two classics from the mid-1960s the Burt Bacharach and Hal David penned "Alfie" and Bob Crewe's "Music to Watch Girls By." Fitzgerald is accompanied by a piano trio, and on several songs by the Ellington orchestra, with whom she had a lengthy 1960s collaboration. Ellington doesn't play, however, and the understated arrangements leave the spotlight entirely to Fitzgerald. She's in a playful mood in her on stage banter, teasing a late arrival, impersonating Louis Armstrong, and ruling out a striptease. Her singing is radiant as she turns sophisticated melodies

into a thrill ride. Their direction is as unpredictable as a pinball, with rhythmic daring and inventiveness that could make an arena sway. And it probably did. Fitzgerald flies high on "Mack the Knife," and displays jazzy verve on Benny Goodman's "Don't Be That Way" and the Tony Bennett staple "The Moment of Truth," while "You've Changed" shimmers with bluesy beauty. On "Let's Do It (Let's Fall in Love)," her phrasing is as clever as Cole Porter's lyrics. In her version, she injects references to the Beatles, James Bond, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. □



This album cover image released by Verve shows "The Moment Of Truth: Ella At The Coliseum" by Ella Fitzgerald.

Associated Press

NFL NextGen Stats team unveils new tool to help fans better understand combine results

By JOSH DUBOW
AP Pro Football Writer

The NFL scouting combine provides a blizzard of data with hundreds of prospects running through various drills ranging from the 40-yard dash to the vertical jump to a short shuttle. Sifting through all that can be overwhelming for the most seasoned of NFL executives, much less the countless fans who will spend the next few months trying to become draft experts. The NFL's NextGen Stats team has partnered with Amazon QuickSight's machine learning tool to put all those numbers in a more comprehensible form as part of Combine IQ, which was released to the public on Thursday on the NFL's website.

"It's in the name: Combine IQ. We came up with that because that is what we want people to take away, which is to make you smarter about the combine," said Mike Band, the senior manager for research and analytics at NFL NextGen Stats. "We want fans to really understand the numbers that are being collected and the ways you can visualize and make this



Texas wide receiver Xavier Worthy runs the 40-yard dash at the NFL football scouting combine, Saturday, March 2, 2024, in Indianapolis.

Associated Press

data digestible and yet insightful."

The dashboard will post results on all of the drills, including tracking data from RFID sensors on each player, and put them into a player projection model that also takes into account college production, size and a consensus big board of 10 draft rankings to grade each player on a scale of 50 to 99 in athleticism, production and an overall draft score.

The NextGen stats team has modeled combine data back to 2003, allowing fans to compare players over a more than two-decade stretch with the rankings correlating well to NFL success based on measurements like becoming a starter or a Pro Bowler. The NextGen stats team will validate all the data as its being collected to make sure it is accurate before being posted on the website, typically within 10 min-

utes or less of a player finishing a drill. The numbers and analysis will be available to fans on the website and used by NFL Network on the broadcast of the combine. The data will be able to be sorted by the top performers in various aspects of each event, as well as having spider graphs that compare players at the same position in every drill and measurement, including the NextGen Stats' production and athleticism scores.

"These are professional level analytics that were previously only available to NFL teams, and we're making them accessible to fans everywhere, which is pretty cool," said Ari Entin, the head of sports marketing at AWS.

"This is a new way to capture, visualize and analyze athletic performance data in real time."

For players who don't test in the drills at the combine, the model will produce estimated athleticism scores based on college data that has been collected. The numbers go deeper than just the straight times for an event like the 40 with players also ranked based on top speed, 10-yard split, speed at 10 yards and acceleration. The data shows that Xavier Worthy had the fastest speed at every 10-yard interval last year when he set a combine record in the 40 at 4.21 seconds.

The dashboard also has data on how combine tests correlate to NFL success at each position with the athleticism scores at edge rusher and cornerback being most important and least important for centers and safeties. □

Jannik Sinner's nomination for Laureus sportsman of year withdrawn after ban

LONDON (AP) — The nomination of Jannik Sinner for the Laureus sportsman of the year award was withdrawn Thursday because of the top-ranked tennis player's three-month ban for his two positive doping tests nearly a year ago. Laureus World Sports Academy chairman Sean Fitzpatrick said in a statement that the Italian player's ban resulting from a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency prompted the decision. "Following discussions by the Laureus Academy it has been decided that Jannik Sinner's nomination for this year's Laureus world sportsman of the

year award is to be withdrawn," Fitzpatrick said. "We have followed this case, the decisions of the relevant global bodies and whilst we note the extenuating circumstances involved feel that the three-month ban renders the nomination ineligible. Jannik and his team have been informed." Sinner and WADA announced the settlement on Feb. 15. WADA, which had sought to ban the three-time Grand Slam champion from the sport for at least one year, had challenged a decision last year by the International Tennis Integrity Agency not to suspend Sinner for what

the ITIA judged was accidental contamination by a banned anabolic steroid

last March. Sinner's explanation that trace amounts of Closte-



Jannik Sinner of Italy celebrates after defeating Alexander Zverev of Germany in the men's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Jan. 26, 2025.

Associated Press

bol in his doping sample was due to a massage from a trainer who used the substance after cutting his own finger had been accepted.

The timing means the 23-year-old Italian won't miss any Grand Slam tournaments. The French Open, the season's next major, starts May 25. Last year, Novak Djokovic won the Laureus sportsman of the year award for 2023 and Spanish soccer star Aitana Bonmatí was picked as the best sportswoman.

Nominees for the upcoming awards will be announced in Madrid on Monday. □



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Popovich says he will not return to the Spurs this season, has hope of coaching in the future

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
AP Basketball Writer

Gregg Popovich will not coach this season. He is not ruling out a comeback in the future.

Popovich met with the San Antonio Spurs on Thursday, releasing a statement afterward to make his decision on this season and hope for next season public. The 76-year-old Popovich, the NBA's all-time coaching wins leader, had a stroke at the team's arena in San Antonio on Nov. 2 and has been away from the team since.

"I've decided not to return to the sidelines this season," Popovich said in a statement distributed by the team. "(Acting coach) Mitch Johnson and his staff have done a wonderful job and the resolve and professionalism the players have shown, sticking together during a challenging sea-



son, has been outstanding."

Popovich has been in regular contact with Johnson,

some team officials and has talked with some players at times during his absence but he has not been

seen at games or been known to be at any practices since the stroke happened.

San Antonio Spurs head coach Gregg Popovich during the second half of a preseason NBA basketball game against the Orlando Magic in San Antonio, Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024.

Associated Press

"I will continue to focus on my health with the hope that I can return to coaching in the future," Popovich said.

Popovich's visit to the team came a week after the Spurs announced that All-Star center Victor Wembanyama the defensive player of the year favorite at the time and someone who was a serious candidate to make the All-NBA team will not play again this season after deep vein thrombosis, or a blood clot, was found in his right shoulder.

Wembanyama, who came to San Antonio as the No. 1 pick in the 2023 draft after playing as a pro in France, has called Popovich his biggest basketball influence.

"Pop isn't just a coach or a boss," the 21-year-old Wembanyama said earlier this month. "Pop is a leader." □